

George Brown News

A newsletter for staff, faculty and alumni of George Brown College

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Communications creates 'candidate of choice' graduates

By Ailsa Kay

One of our key objectives, as a college, is to help our students achieve success—and that means ensuring George Brown graduates get the jobs they want. And, indeed, The Path to Leadership clearly says that our goal is to make our graduates "candidates of choice" for employers.

This clarity creates a real academic imperative for our college: We must graduate students who have the skills (soft and hard), education and real-world, hands-on experience to give them an advantage in the hunt for rewarding careers. For most graduates an important first step in the hiring process starts with the ability to write error-free and compelling resumes and cover letters—which are essential for being granted an interview. Once in an interview, our graduates must be able to speak effectively and express themselves clearly—it is usually their one opportunity to convince an employer of their intelligence and capabilities. Anyone involved in hiring knows many people look good on paper—but eliminate themselves from consideration because they cannot convincingly present their thoughts and ideas.

Without a suitably high level of written and oral communication skills our graduates will seldom be "candidates of choice" regardless of the other competencies and skills they acquire as GBC students.

Poor communication skill can prevent our graduates from obtaining the best jobs available; it can also hold them back over the span of their careers, limiting their potential for promotion and career growth, income levels, and social mobility.

Employers already understand the importance of communication for their employees. When we surveyed George Brown workplace partners, we found that approximately 80 per cent of respondents agreed that writing clearly, effectively, and grammatically is important to employees' success in the workplace. They also said they wanted to hire people who could: read effectively, and draw key information from reports and written messages; speak effectively in summarizing and making points; use professional tone and language; and demonstrate cross-cultural awareness in communications.

Students, for their part, also recognize the importance of communication skills to their future success. According to 2005 KPI data, 83 per cent of students consider writing important, and 89 per cent consider speaking important. But there is a gap in our performance as a college. Only 54 to 60 per cent of students were satisfied that George Brown programs helped develop these skills. There is our call to action. There are clear opportunities for improvement and this is where George Brown is focusing its efforts.

The communications challenge for George Brown becomes urgent taking into account that we hope to enroll more students every year and have embraced the principles of access. This could mean we may be enrolling more students who meet admissions standards but need more help to meet the communication demands of college, let alone the

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Fernanda Caldarella, Senior Student Services Representative in the Faculty of Business and Creative Arts at Casa Loma, hunts for United Way Leaders in October. As a United Way Ambassador, Caldarella gave out information and pledge forms about the charity funding organization to her colleagues. The George Brown campaign—with the theme Hunting for Leaders—continues into December with many special events. See page 4 for a spooky Halloween fundraiser.

George Brown leads – with our hearts

George Brown employees are leaders—with their hearts.

It looks as if George Brown might once again lead all other metro colleges in United Way donations this year.

Last year nearly twice as many staff helped others in our community through workplace donations than employees at the other GTA colleges. And George Brown staff were also more generous—with higher average donations than our colleagues at other colleges.

The United Way of Greater Toronto distributes money to hundreds of charitable agencies in the city, allowing them to provide services to the poor, the elderly, and other disadvantaged groups.

This year—if history repeats itself—George Brown will maintain its leadership position and meet or exceed its United Way goal of \$115,000—up \$10,000 from last year.

By Oct. 26 the campaign had already raised \$97,000—well ahead of the amount at the same point last year—no doubt in part to some crazy hats and stuffed animals.

This year's campaign, under the leadership of co-chairs Staff Training Development Director Bob Cox and Marketing Vice-President Karen Thomson, went wild with a jungle theme and the slogan "Looking for Leaders." Staff are sporting explorer's helmets and carrying around plush wild animals to raise awareness of the campaign as they encourage more people to make contributions (no amount is too small!), and become United Way leaders. Those "Leaders"—defined as staff who donated \$500 or more—were responsible for meeting more than half the campaign total last year.

Fundraising events for the college's United Way Campaign continue into December and include an on-line auction, draw, flu clinic, as well as craft, book and bake sales. For details go to the college's intranet—type "insite" in your web browser on your college computer.

Survey says! Staff invited to express their thoughts

The college is looking for your feedback. The George Brown College Staff Survey, which kicked off in late October and runs until November 10th, is an opportunity for all staff to provide their thoughts, confidentially, on what GBC is doing well, and what the college could be doing better.

Nancy Hood, executive director of Human Resources says the purpose of the survey is to gather the big picture. "We want the collective opinions of staff, generally, as well as to know what people are thinking by division or department. The sort of information we collect helps us to really understand the three or four key areas that need attention—so we can address those challenges effectively," she says.

Graphic Design professor Dale Atkinson says he's eager to make his voice heard and share his thoughts. He's got ideas about making his department's physical space more appealing to better attract design-conscious, potential students. He also wants more information sharing with his fellow professors—"It's good to know what your colleagues are doing," he says.

By early November, nearly half of full-time staff had completed the on-line survey, which includes 85 statements to which participants indicate their agreement or disagreement on a six-point scale. Topics covered range from academic excellence and communications, college and work environments, to leadership and management at GBC. There is also ample space to provide written comments or to address topics or areas of concern not directly covered by the survey questions.

Survey results will be shared college wide, and used to set priorities and set strategies to make GBC even better. Preliminary results are expected before the New Year.

The survey—which is also available in hard copy for those with no access to a computer—is conducted for the college by Compustat Consultants. Staff responses are completely confidential. Individual responses will never be personally identified.

Results of the 2004 full-time staff survey and more information about this year's survey are available on the Human Resources section of Insite, GBC's intranet site—just type "insite" into your web browser.



Toronto Mayor David Miller supports George Brown's recruiting efforts at the Metro Toronto College Fair in October. To his left in photo is Community Services and Health Sciences Dean Lori Shekter-Wolfson, and Student Recruiter Liz Henriques is on his right. Fair organizers anticipated more than 7,000 students at the all-day event held at the CHE.

Fight Islamophobia, journalist urges

When setting its priorities for the year, the College's Diversity, Equity and Safety Subcommittee identified "Islamophobia" as an issue that had received too little attention at GBC and so decided to do something about it, says committee member Maureen Hynes. The Diversity Committee was formed to foster new initiatives and expand our understanding of, commitment to, and performance on diversity issues.

"What it means to be Muslim in Canada is certainly a timely issue, post-9/11 and we realized we needed to address those challenges," Hynes says. The Committee wanted to provide staff and students—Muslims and non-Muslims alike—a chance to discuss the reality of being Muslim in the current environment, so they turned to a well-known Muslim journalist and author to provide first-hand knowledge of the challenges.

Haron Siddiqui told staff and students at a luncheon address at the College in October that Muslims in western countries can feel as if they are under "psychological internment."

"Many people believe that the West is under siege from Muslim terrorists. I am here to tell you that it is just the opposite—Muslims have been the biggest targets of attack since 9/11," said Siddiqui. He supported his claims with statistics from the war in Iraq, and the

targeting of Muslims in Western countries.

Siddiqui is a Toronto Star columnist and editorial writer and author of the book, *Being Muslim*. A former president of PEN Canada and Order of Canada recipient, Siddiqui is known as a moderate who is committed to dispelling prejudice and ignorance.

He believes in Canada's unique perspective and is hopeful about achieving peace. He stressed the importance of dialogue and challenged his George Brown audience to keep informed and fight Islamophobia.

Yasmin Walli works in the Registrar's Office and says as a Muslim she was glad Siddiqui was invited to speak at GBC. She has read his book and calls him a "modern thinker." "It was encouraging to see not only Muslims there, but many non-Muslims—people really wanted to understand better, and that's good," she says. "I agree with Mr. Siddiqui that people only have media images or stereotypes and can't see what being Muslim is really about. That's why it's so important for people to learn more, to start a dialogue so we can talk about things, and not be afraid. As an individual I try to educate people all the time about being Muslim and having Mr. Siddiqui speak to the college community was a big step in starting more meaningful dialogue."

Bathroom tissue gown wins student design competition

A George Brown fashion student has won a design competition by creating an elegant floor-length evening gown made entirely of white bathroom tissue.

Second year student Nancy Hoang, 20, was chosen winner of the White Cashmere Student Design Competition in Toronto on Sept. 21, edging out seven other finalists from three Toronto-area colleges.

The competition was dominated by the creativity of George Brown students. George Brown not only sent two finalists to the competition from the preliminary college-based competition, but judges selected two additional students from the college to occupy "wild card" finalist spots from among the more than 100 students who entered the contest at the three colleges. Hoang's gown, which has an asymmetrical hem and ruffles, was inspired by the concept of purity. "I tried to incorporate the ideas of ballerinas, flowers and dolls," she says.

Shaping the delicate paper also required special techniques—for the flowing skirt of the dress Hoang dampened the paper and then dried with a hair dryer to stiffen it.

Hoang received a \$2,500 dollar bursary for her winning garment.

"I was able to push my creativity further than ever before to accomplish the desired look in my garment. This opportunity has taught me that fashion has no limits as long as you use your imagination."

Other George Brown finalists were Caroline Rosenberg, Stephanie Kidd, and Stephanie Paczay.

The eight-month competition, curated by famed Canadian designer David Dixon,



George Brown fashion student Nancy Hoang's bathroom tissue evening gown (above left) won the Toronto White Cashmere fashion competition at George Brown's Young Centre for the Performing Arts on Sept. 21, 2006. George Brown dominated the contest—taking four out of eight finalist spots. Here models wear the bathroom tissue garments created by George Brown fashion students (from left) Nancy Hoang, Caroline Rosenberg, Stephanie Kidd, and Stephanie Paczay.

involved students from George Brown, Seneca College and the International Academy of Design. The eight finalists were selected to show their garments to an elite panel of judges on Sept. 21 led by Susan Langdon, Executive Director of the Toronto Fashion Incubator.

Why bathroom tissue? The competition was sponsored by Scott Paper, the makers of Cashmere bathroom tissue, to spread word

through the media of its arrival on store shelves under a new name—it was previously known as Cottonelle.

George Brown offers five programs leading to careers in the fashion industry—Fashion Techniques and Design, Fashion Management, Fashion Business Industry, International Fashion Development and Management (Post-Graduate), and Costume Studies (Post-Graduate).

Communications (continued from page 1)

rigors of the hiring process and workplace. Consider that our Assessment Centre reports that 48 per cent of recent college entrants required remediation for English skills.

Important steps to meet these challenges are underway, and George Brown is already on track to start improving the communication skills of our graduates. The College's Academic Strategy Enhanced Communication Projects, currently in the pilot phase, aim to:

- improve the communication ability of individual students
- increase their career options and opportunities
- give students the strategies and the confidence to make their own voices heard.

Meeting these objectives is a tall order,

but we have set conservative, measurable goals. We want to: improve the delivery of communication skills across all programs (two per cent increase in student satisfaction); keep students in school longer (two per cent increase in retention); and reduce the failure rate in remedial courses (to 10 per cent).

What these goals mean when measured by student success, however, is much more compelling and important—with the proper communication skills, our students are more likely to become "candidates of choice" for employers after they graduate and to realize the dreams that brought them to college in the first place.

If more of our graduates land the jobs they want we all benefit. Studies show that communi-

cation skills are the largely unused and unrecognized driver of economic development and wealth. One example: Margaret Eaton, president of ABC Canada Literacy Foundation, remarked recently "The evidence suggests that if Canada found a way to increase literacy levels by 10 per cent over a decade, GDP per capita would rise a staggering 15 per cent—equal to roughly \$ 18 billion in today's terms."

We might never be able to put a dollar figure on our emphasis on communications at George Brown—but providing our students with such advantages is a worthy long-term investment in the happiness and success of our students.

Alita Kay is Project Coordinator, Academic Strategy Enhanced Communication (ASEC)

President Anne Sado

Q: How are we progressing on the implementation of the Academic Strategy?

I'm pleased to report that the commitment to achieving the goals of our Academic Strategy remains very high across the college. There are challenges, of course, not the least of which is whether or not we will secure adequate funding to implement everything that we hope to accomplish. However, I'm also happy to report that a great deal of activity, marked by real progress, is taking place on a number of important fronts.

The communication pilots are well underway following the development of several solid recommendations by the communications working group, aimed at ensuring the overall excellence of English language proficiency among our students, and thus graduates, is advanced. A revised English course is currently in pilot phase. The redesign of the Tutoring and Learning Centres is underway to ensure TLCs meet the current, specific and evolving needs of students. And a trial program to advance students' communication skills is underway in practical nursing—the pilot is part of the broader effort to embed communication skills across all college curriculum and provide students with much-needed, meaningful practice in speaking and writing.

On another front, we have recently initiated the faculty performance review pilot. This is a critical endeavour in support of our overarching goal of excellence in teaching and applied learning. The performance review pilot is structured to lead to an outcome that offers our faculty meaningful professional development. It includes portfolio development, and peer and leader review.

Over 30 faculty (including Deans and Chairs) have volunteered and are taking part in the faculty review test phase. Modeled on best practices used elsewhere in Ontario's college system, the pilot will wrap up next fall, out of which we expect recommendations on introducing a full faculty performance review



HALLOWEEN UNITED WAY FUNDRAISER—Staff of the President's Office at St. James raised money for the college's United Way campaign (see story on page 1) on Oct. 31 by dressing up as storybook characters, decorating their office, and selling treats. From left is Red Riding Hood (also known as Diane Fantinato), Snow White (Fatima Gata) and Gretel (Cathie Pak). Many other fun fund-raising events are planned for the coming weeks.

process which is both practical and implementable. A good and effective performance appraisal tool will give our faculty the support they need to: demonstrate to students that they care; provide students with clear classroom and course expectations; and to ultimately give students a classroom experience in which they feel they are learning the knowledge and skills necessary for their careers.

The process improvement projects are also moving forward. Progress has been made on the "end of term/start of term," which aims to simplify and automate processes such as program promotions, grade processing and to flag where students may need assistance regarding course requirement fulfillments. In student records, for example, efficiency improvements have been realized so that

grades are now being more accurately entered the first time.

Progress is also being made on curriculum mapping. Both existing and new programs are being targeted and templates produced. A program mapping handbook has been drafted and is being circulated for input by the outcomes based learning committee—a copy will also soon be put on our intranet site, Insite, for general comment. The mapping is a particularly important initiative as successful completion will clarify expectations for students (and faculty) regarding the inter-relationship between courses and the resulting program outcomes.

This overview just touches on the many projects being carried out across the college as part of making our Academic Strategy real. At the heart of the Strategy is our goal to make excellence in teaching and applied learning the hallmark of a George Brown education that results in our graduates being the candidates of choice for employers. There is much more to be accomplished, of course, but our dedication is high and our progress strong as we move toward realizing that goal.

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